

# microworlds





# *Microcosm*

Volume II - Number II

Spring, 1975

## *Special Arts Festival Edition*

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## *Editor's Note —*

**Microcosm** is published twice each year at Copiah-Lincoln Junior College, Wesson, Mississippi. This edition is the Arts Festival, Spring edition, Volume 2, Number 2. To encourage writing for this edition, the **Microcosm** staff, under the direction of Mrs. Edna Earle Crews, sponsored a literary competition for high school students in this junior college district and for Copiah-Lincoln Junior College students. The **Microcosm** staff wishes to thank all who submitted material to the contest. The college entries were judged by Dr. Rosalie Daniels, Associate Professor of English at Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi. Dr. Daniels teaches literature and creative writing. The high school entries were judged by the **Microcosm** staff. The second place and third place winners in the junior division are not printed in this issue. However, I would like to congratulate Willie J. McCreary and Sherry Killingsworth for poetry; Stan Patrick for his second place essay; and Beth Patterson and Linda Wooten in the short story division. Special thanks go to Mr. Ruff Turner for assisting with the illustrations.

John Lowry

# Microcosm

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# *Trilogy*

## PRETENSE

I was nothing, I was no one  
    but it didn't matter to you.  
You only wanted a parker brother  
    to keep you with something to do.

You made newsprint love  
    But mine was so real.  
I was in it for an almost forgotten dream come true,  
    You were in it for a thrill.

I was a Red Cross lover,  
    Torn and in need of aid.  
You were reading social model direction books  
    That construct something that can't just be made.

I'm nothing, I'm no one  
    But I've made it from yesterday.  
From you and your doll house romance  
    And your no love, loving way.

I'll be nothing, I'll be no one.  
    I'll be left without a plan  
But no one can still have dreams of loving  
    Without being a widower's best man.

## CARMAN'S WORLD

In Carman's World, oceans swirl  
And drown the solid ground mutants  
That abound on Lifestarve Street.  
And Carman's eyes blink.

In Carman's World, there are squeaking sounds  
That surround anticipation of a trumpet blast  
That only Carman can hear.

In Carman's World, silence wins  
The Death Race Trophy for competence  
And continuity on tracks that never end.

In Carman's World, lead is gold,  
In a story that's told,  
But still keeps Carman guessing.

In Carman's World, flight conspirators creep  
And although Carman sees them  
He prefers to sleep.  
And Carman sleeps.



## PAPIER MACHE MAN

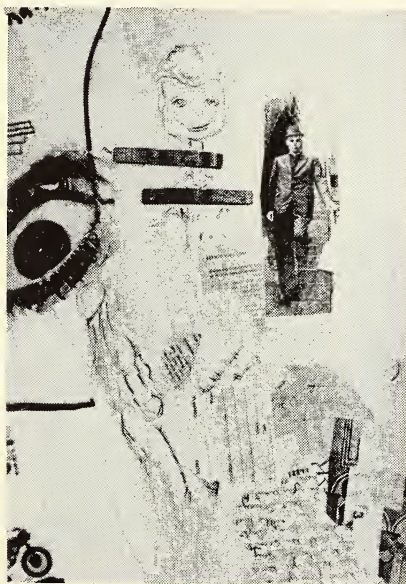
See him sitting in his papier mache room.  
Feeling a way he's never felt before.  
He feels just like some starving dog  
Bound to some bakery door.

He makes love to his paper dolls,  
That don't know what they're doing.  
They murder him in his sleep each night,  
The next day they ask, "How's it going?"

Maybe he'll find peace someday  
If until someday he can endure.  
Maybe he'll find himself somehow,  
But maybe's not for sure.

He's broken and beaten, lonely and tired,  
His whole life has been spent running.  
So run tell the doll collector today,  
That the Papier Mache Man is burning.

—Derrell Smith



# *How It All Began*

In the beginning, a long time ago, God was lonely so He made snow. The snow didn't last, it melted away; so God created light and called it day. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

As God looked around and saw there was nothing to see, He decided to create a firmament and call it heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

God became thirsty for something to drink. He created water and called it sea. When He saw there was too much sea, He created America and called it free. And God saw that it was great. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

When God became cold from so much snow, He created fire and called it the sun. And God saw that it was out of sight. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

God, thinking it was Friday, created fish. He created bluefish, catfish, flounder, bream, plus the sharks, to put the fear of God in them. Then, finding that it was only Thursday, He created birds and called it fowl. And God saw that this was fantastic. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

God, seeing his reflection in the snow, created a snowman. This creation did not last; his sun melted it away. So finally God settled on red clay and created the Indian and placed him in America. And when God saw everything that He had made He said, "Right on." And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

On the seventh day God rested and the Marines shoveled snow.

There are also many other things which God did; if they were written down, the world alone could not hold the books that would be written.

— Randy Bradshaw

# *Survival vs Death*

Although ocean voyages are not new to me, I have never grown accustomed to them. I get very little sleep crossing the Pacific, not being able to close my eyes until I have reached safety. Since business often makes it necessary for me to travel to other countries, my wife has urged me to travel by air, but I'm afraid to fly. The rocking of a ship causes nervousness in both my stomach and my mind, but the thought of traveling through air terrifies me, so I face my insomnia and my inability to eat anything.

It is impossible to lie in bed and stare at the ceiling all night, especially with an empty stomach, so I have accustomed myself to aimless pacing on the deck.

I was delighted on the last voyage to discover a fellow insomniac like myself, named Pickering. Pickering was a businessman, younger than me, perhaps twenty. A nice man whose company I enjoyed late at night when all other passengers slept. I found no fault in him at all.

The nights were spent in conversation, talking about food and the big meal we would have when we reached our destination, pacing the deck, or playing pool. Being of equal incompetence we wiled away many hours in the pool room.

The seventh night of the trip was spent in the pool room where we played, talked, and awaited dawn. It was a cool night and we had closed the windows to keep out the chill.

It was only ten minutes after we had entered this room that it happened. I don't know what it was, an explosion in the engines or something of that nature. Whatever it was, the silence was torn apart by a tremendous sound that dulled the senses and sent the ship, the *Edna Earle*, in a jerking spasm. Pickering and I were thrown to the floor and pool balls scattered in every direction.

The ship suddenly stopped and I struggled to my feet toward the door. The ship lurched, and looking out the window I saw us sinking into black emptiness. The water boiled with bubbles outside the window and I slumped to the floor, terrified, knowing we were sinking and in a matter of seconds I'd be dead.

A final leap, and all movement stopped. The ship lay at the bottom of the sea.

A part of me screamed in horror, but another part of me was calm. We were on bottom, but how far from the surface? Not too far or the water pressure would burst the windows. Could I dare leave

the ship, this pocket of trapped air, or should I risk bursting my lungs fighting the water to the surface? I couldn't take a chance.

A moan reminded me of Pickering and I turned and saw him lying on the floor. I stared at him. He seemed calm as he said, "What are we going to do? What a way to die."

"We may not die," I told him. "If there were survivors they would know where the ship went down and divers would come."

"If there were survivors," Pick said. "And, if not?"

I sat down, "Then we are dead men."

We looked up at the dimming lights. They flickered and suddenly went out leaving us in total darkness.

How long we sat there I don't know, but suddenly realized it wasn't quite so dark any more. I could make out shapes and see Pickering sitting in another chair.

He stirred. "It must be daylight," he said. "A sunny day on the surface. How long do you suppose the air will last?"

"I don't know. It's a large room and there's only two of us. Long enough for us to starve to death, I suppose." Starve! Suddenly I realized how hungry I was, for it had been seven days since I had eaten anything but crackers. It hadn't occurred to me that we were without food.

Pickering got to his feet and paced about restlessly. "How long do you suppose it will take. Today? Tomorrow? Next week?"

"I don't know," I answered.

Pick laughed, stopped by the pool table and picked up a ball, tossing it in the air and catching it. "I could solve our problem easily by throwing this ball through the window."

I jumped to my feet. "Put it down! If you don't care nothing for your life, at least remember I want to live!"

Again he laughed, and dropped the ball on the table. He paced for a while longer, then sank into a chair. "I'm tired, I think I could sleep."

I was afraid to sleep, afraid that Pick would open the door or throw the ball through the window. I sat and watched him for a long time, but my eyelids grew heavy and I slept.

When I awoke, it was dark and I could hear Pick breathing. He woke as it was growing light.

Pickering grumbled and got to his feet. "I'm hungry," he muttered.

"Maybe they'll come today," I said.

"And maybe they'll never come." He paced around the room. "My stomach is full of cramps." He stopped by a window looking



out. "I'm thirsty, why don't I open the window and let some water in?"

"Stay away from there!" I hurried across the room and pulled him away from the window. "Pick, for God's sake, get hold of yourself. Don't you want to live?"

"Live?" He laughed, "I died the day before yesterday." He jerked away from me. "I'm dead," he said, "dead and my stomach doesn't know it. Oh, damn this pain. Blair, believe me, if I don't get food soon, I'll go out of my mind."

I stood watching him, unable to say a thing. He suddenly laughed again and said, "I have read of men, isolated, without food, who finally turned to the last solution to solve the hunger problem."

I didn't understand. I said, "What is that?"

"Each other," he said.

I stared at him with horror and tried to speak. "Cannibalism? Good God, Pick, you don't mean--"

Again he laughed. "Don't worry, Blair. I don't think I could. If I could cook you, I might consider it. But raw? No, I don't believe I'll ever get that hungry."

He grew quiet, and I sat as far from him as I could. I meant to stay awake now, no matter what. This man was insane and capable of anything. I dreaded the coming darkness of night.

Blackness came, and I waited for the attack I knew must come. I was imprisoned with a madman; my only hope was in staying awake.

My terror kept me awake all night and all through the next day. Pickering slept most of the day. I couldn't stay awake forever! As darkness returned again, as the third day ended, a heavy sleep fell on me.

I woke suddenly. It was day again and I couldn't breathe. Pick stood over me, his hands around my neck, squeezing, shutting off air from my lungs. His eyes gleamed with madness and his mouth hung open in a crazy laugh.

I pulled at his hands, but they held me tight. I struggled. My fingers touched his face and I lunged at his eyes. My finger drove into his eye, and he screamed, then released me. He fell back and I felt the warm jelly of his eye on my finger.

I jumped up, looking for escape while he came at me again. I ran and fell against one of the pool tables. My hand touched a pool stick, I picked it up, turned, and swung at Pickering. He fell back, screaming, but then came on again. I jabbed the stick hard into his open mouth.

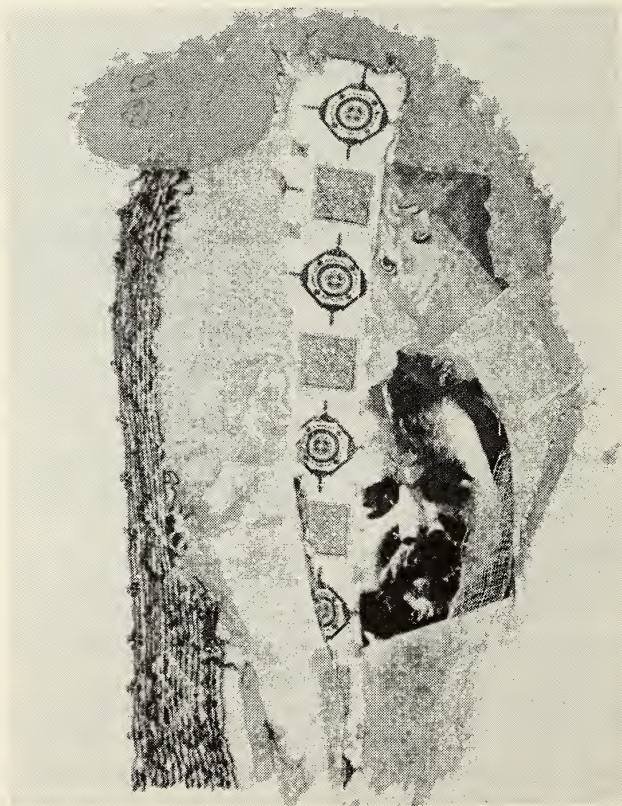
The stick broke into, part of it still in my hands, part sticking out of his mouth. He fell face forward to the floor, driving the piece of stick through the back of his head.

I turned and fell over the table. I felt terribly sick but it had been so long since I had eaten that I could bring nothing up, but only lie there shaking.

That was three days ago, and they still haven't come. The air is growing foul in here, I can hardly breathe any more. I find that I am talking to myself, and every once in a while I will pick up a pool ball and look quietly at the window.

The worst thing is the hunger. Pickering is gone, now, all gone, and I am hungry again.

—Kenny Blair





# *Tiny Steps in the Sand*

With the lines in the waves that came  
rushing in . . .

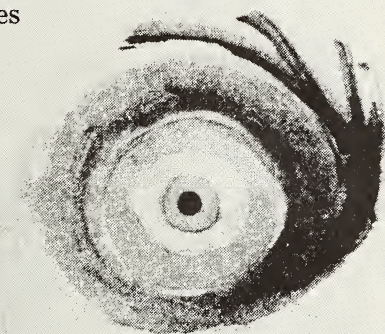
I find a line of tiny steps where  
only a child  
had been . . .

The horizon was yellow-the cliffs were  
miles away  
with only the tiny steps  
in the sand to  
remind me that someone had been  
here before . . .

There was a calmness about the waves  
and the water was cool as life  
yet-the distance of life  
out there was like  
eternity  
standing here.

The tiny steps in the sand led to  
a life beyond my reach -  
to a cloud too high to see -  
and with only the tiny steps  
in the sand do I remember it was  
I who had been here -  
yet - seems like only yesterday.

—Gay Harveston



# *The Art of Wasting Time*

Surely, at one time or another, almost everyone has been accused of wasting time. In truth, if most time-wasting activities are analyzed, they are proved to have purposes and results; therefore, they utilize time for future happenings. One cannot be hasty in labeling something "a waste of time."

An accomplished time-waster knows the little snags and peculiarities of his art. For one thing, people - and their opinions - are different. An activity that seems totally fruitless to an observer may be helpful or enjoyable to the participant. For example, one person may be engrossed in reading about the importance of dodo birds in today's society, while another person may look on it as a boring waste of time - especially since dodos are extinct. Differing ideas depend on individual interests in the time wasting project.

For those people who feel guilty about wasting time - take heart! An actual waste of time is rare. Almost every so-called waste is not a waste at all; it has a purpose or a result. If a person wastes time by sleeping, energy is stored for a future need. The time-waster who writes or doodles is being creative. Similarly, someone who just sits doing nothing is given the chance to think and dream. Are thoughts and dreams useless? I, for one, do not think so.

True time-wasting is achieved only when the artist does absolutely nothing. For this, complete absence is a necessity - absence of action, of purpose, and of mind. This does not mean that absent-minded people are closer to attaining the perfection of wasting time, for even absent-minded people think; they are actually absent-minded. Using time without any purpose or result is the goal that a sincere time-waster strives for.

Meanings sometimes become distorted with use; so it is with "a waste of time." To some, my writing this may be considered a time-wasting occupation that has no purpose or consequence. However, I must contradict their reasoning by the simple fact that I am writing. My reasons are individual and private, but the result of this writing is obvious.

—Carol Cupitt

## *The Mule's Bray*

Farmer Douglas has always been known for growing vegetables, and he can show you the biggest plot of whatever you can name. Corn, broccoli, cauliflower, okra, tomatoes, beans, beets, and a great many greens---he grows them all. Oh, he also grows cabbage in four long rows as far as the eye can see. Do tell, he didn't get there overnight. I can vouch for that, since I pulled his plow. Contrary to popular belief, he had trouble on his hands like a one-armed monkey in an ant bed. Oh, I can clearly remember what I observed of his troubles. Ironically, it seems that one so indebted to his mule would have understood me more, for my story has bearing on where I am now.

Of course, he began a patch about one-fourth its present size, when that character Jack Rabbit was still around. Among rabbits Jack was a skunk with a stinking personality. He gave Mr. Douglas a hard time, because cabbage leaves were important to Jack. Jack stopped at nothing for cabbage, thinking he could be excused, because Douglas had plenty of cabbage and rabbits love cabbage.

Anyway, Jack gave Mr. Douglas a hard time. For everyone except the boss, the spring of that year was really good, but from his view, times were the hardest. Once Farmer Douglas was rocking on the front porch after dinner, half-sleeping. Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the patch, two big ears twitched---close to the cabbage, of course. Jack explained to me that he thought the farmer was still eating. Jack would just nibble his way through, sort of like diving in and swimming, I guess. Then Mrs. Catbird tattled on Jack, and cut twenty winks from one farmer's forty-winks nap. Startled, the boss opened his hawkeyes to find a rabbit in his cabbage. Frantically, he reached for something to throw at Mr. Mischief, shouting, "You go pick in somebody else's patch." But he shouted only to the wind.

It was all too late. Jack was tracking with his armload of leaves toward his green meadow hole. He slid under the old hollow oak his ancestors had lived in for more than five generations. Jack slid home and regained himself. After replacing all the cabbage in the cupboard, he decided to listen to a recording of a whippoorwill singing the lament of a robin to the closing of spring. As he was concentrating and relaxing, an idea came to him. If he could get by the gunshot, he was safe. To assure a lesser chance of being caught, he decided the morning was the best time in the farmer's day, when



the farmer plowed his field. Just then, he heard taps at the front door; Mistress Catbird was knocking. When he opened the door, she dropped in, immediately beginning to warn him about the ferocious bloodhound Mr. Douglas bought, trained to kill. Of course, we farm animals learned later---even though Bugler could sniff out a rabbit amidst skunks, catch it, and kill it---you must tell him it's a rabbit. He was also very gullible. Oh, well, Mrs. Catbird, when she was through, took leave of Jack. She might just as well have not come, because Jack never understood this or any other warning told him. Jack never stopped at anything, and his new plan seemed perfection, even though it might have cost him his hide.

After a few days he resolved to use Bugler in his plan. While Bugler---named for his howl---was sleeping, Jack was making his way across the meadow. Jack inched his way across the road under a starlit sky, barely bright enough to see anything. On the front porch in his rocking chair, Mr. Douglas was keeping a close watch on his patch since the last raid. Along the fence, Jack carefully patted each blade of grass until he got to the driveway. From there he could see clearly that the farmer was asleep, and Jack scampered on to the barn unobtrusively and inaudibly.

"Psst, Psst! Hey, buddy," whispered a faceless voice. Bugler, dead with sleep, heard nothing until being shook a-plenty. After a while, he finally moved an eyelid and saw nothing, but before falling asleep again there came, "Hey, Bugler!" Bugler sensed some voice and raised both eyelids just enough to see long ears. His eyes remained open.

Jack pulled out a gold watch and chain and used a light shining through a crack in the doorway to hypnotize the poor dog. He said, "I am Francis, a squirrel. Remember what I say until I come to the cabbage patch tomorrow. Remember! When I come tomorrow, you will see that I am safe to the cabbage patch. When Mr. Douglas speaks to you, you will roll over and play dead. Then when I leave here tonight, you will remember nothing until I pass the gate in the morning. Then you will remember all I have said tonight." Leaving the dog at rest, Jack put the watch up and quietly out the barn door he tiptoed. Pausing by the fence line, he looked to see if the way was clear. Seeing that Mr. Douglas was still asleep, Jack hurried by, when suddenly the boss snored loudly, scaring the rabbit out of his bones. But the snore was only notice of even deeper sleep. Jack proceeded to the cabbage patch to pick up a midnight snack. Finished with eating and with Bugler, he casually left the field without any further ado.

The next day, Jack returned, while Mr. Douglas was plowing his cornfield. With his wheelbarrow, Jack, grinning from ear to ear at himself, nonchalantly passed the watchful Bugler. Then he began picking the luscious, green cabbage from each row. Somehow Jack never expected Farmer Douglas to return until later, but it was already noon and time for the farmer's dinner. His eyes shone when he saw Jack in the patch, but moreover he was perplexed by the unconcern of his priceless sleeping beauty, Bugler. "Bugler!!" clamored Farmer Douglas, "Wake up! What are you doing? There is a rabbit in the cabbage."

But Bugler---somewhat confused and spellbound---saw not a rabbit, but a squirrel in the cabbage; and in reflex to his master's voice, he rolled over and played dead. Farmer Douglas became furious this time and said in a high tone, "Bugler, I paid four-hundred-fifty dollars for a rabbit-chaser. Don't you know a rabbit when you see one?" But Bugler retained his prone position and remained motionless. Mr. Douglas made it to the hoe leaning against a fence post nearby, and without stopping, crossed over to the opposite end of the field. It was all too late, for Jack---even with his wheelbarrow---made it under the fence, across the meadow, and all the way home before he hoed himself.

This left Farmer Douglas not only steaming but also boiling, and it was fortunate for Bugler that the dinner bell rang and the animals assumed their places for dinner. The farmer could only glare at Bugler.

A day passed and Mr. Douglas, though relieved, wondered where Jack had gone, realizing himself that Jack was planning something. Of course, the enormous amount of cabbage taken from the field would have easily fed twenty rabbits or Jack could still have been gorging himself. However, neither was the case---Jack had already started something---for the lack of something better to do. Why, even Jack knows to save his cabbage for a rainy day. Farmer Douglas decided to wait for Jack by the doorstep with a loaded double-barrel. And he even planted a rabbit trap and began patiently waiting for Jack to appear.

While he was waiting one day, Farmer Douglas noticed a little old lady slowly turning into his driveway. Mr. Douglas put down the shotgun, noticed her small basket, and stepped down to meet her. She said she heard of his delicious cabbage and that she wanted to carry some home with her to try. But even though he was flattered, Mr. Douglas was struck with a note of suspicion. He led her to the greens, where she could pick out the best. That is not to say that Mr.

Douglas suspects every little old lady that he sees---only those with furry paws, long incisors, long ears, and a height of three feet. But the farmer was wise to the scheme, and telling Jack--in disguise--that he would be in the cornfield plowing, he left the lady to contentment. Jack, double-checking, watched him go to the barn for me. Then when Jack was not looking, he veered around the house to get his shotgun off the front porch. Unfortunately, he moved a little too quickly for me, and when he turned around with the gun, I wondered for a moment if any of my feet were broken. Panicking, I reared up and came down on top of the farmer's toes, instantly flattened as dimes. To this Mr. Douglas became most upset, throwing his loaded gun down. A shot rang out that made Jack stop and think--not only think--but also run. His disguise and basketful of cabbage were left behind. I guess our friend the rabbit had decided he didn't like flirting so closely with death, because he never came around to Mr. Douglas's house again.

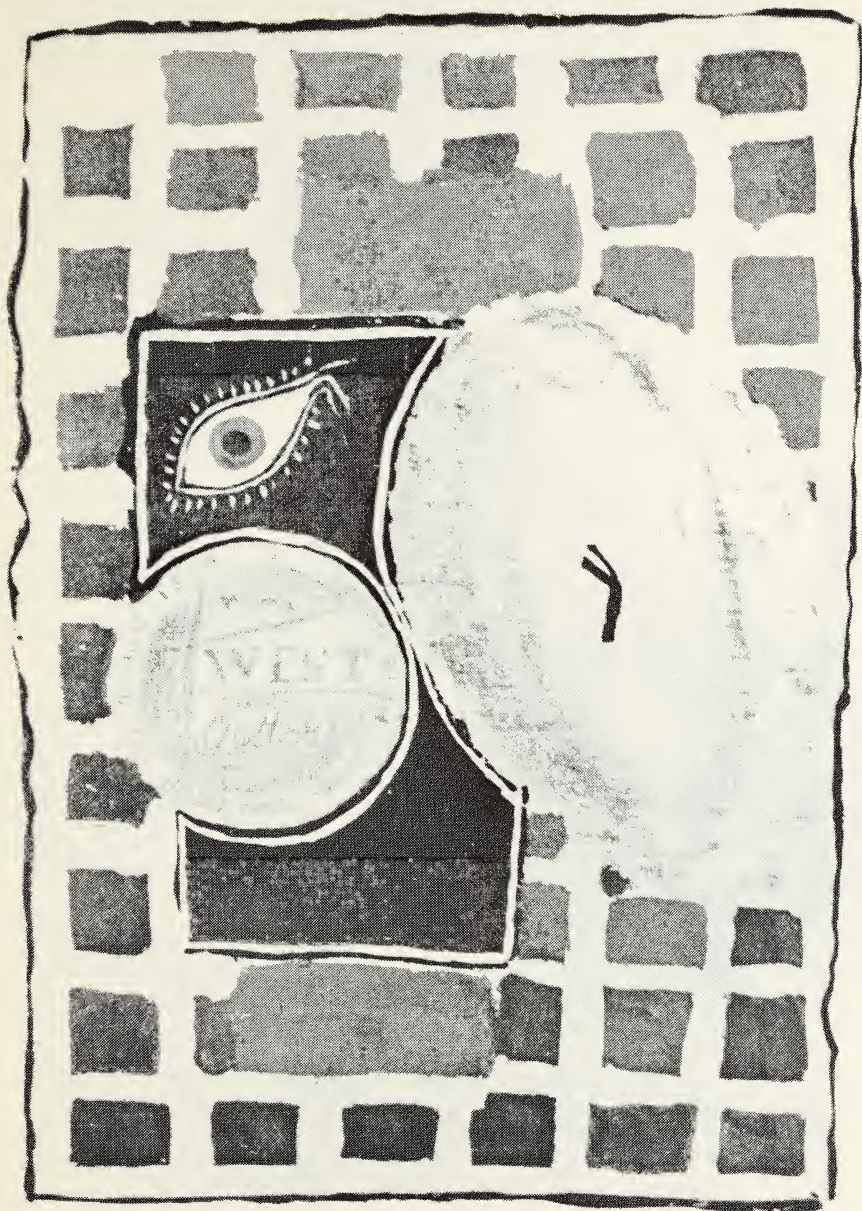
Six weeks later, I saw Jack around my new owner's house and he told me about all his tricks on Mr. Douglas. We had the biggest laugh about it. We agreed that Farmer Douglas was relieved now that Jack had been chased away. You know, Farmer Douglas began having better results in the cabbage-growing department, and he could finally plant his corn without interruption. He became famous, too. Oh, I ought to explain a few things, because I haven't told you the whole story. Even success with the farm didn't change the farmer's feelings for me any better. Had I not jumped at the gun pointed at me and had I not stepped on Mr. Douglas's toes, Jack would have been caught in the farmer's revenge. Nevertheless, it goes to show why you shouldn't point a gun, especially at a mule.

—David Roberts

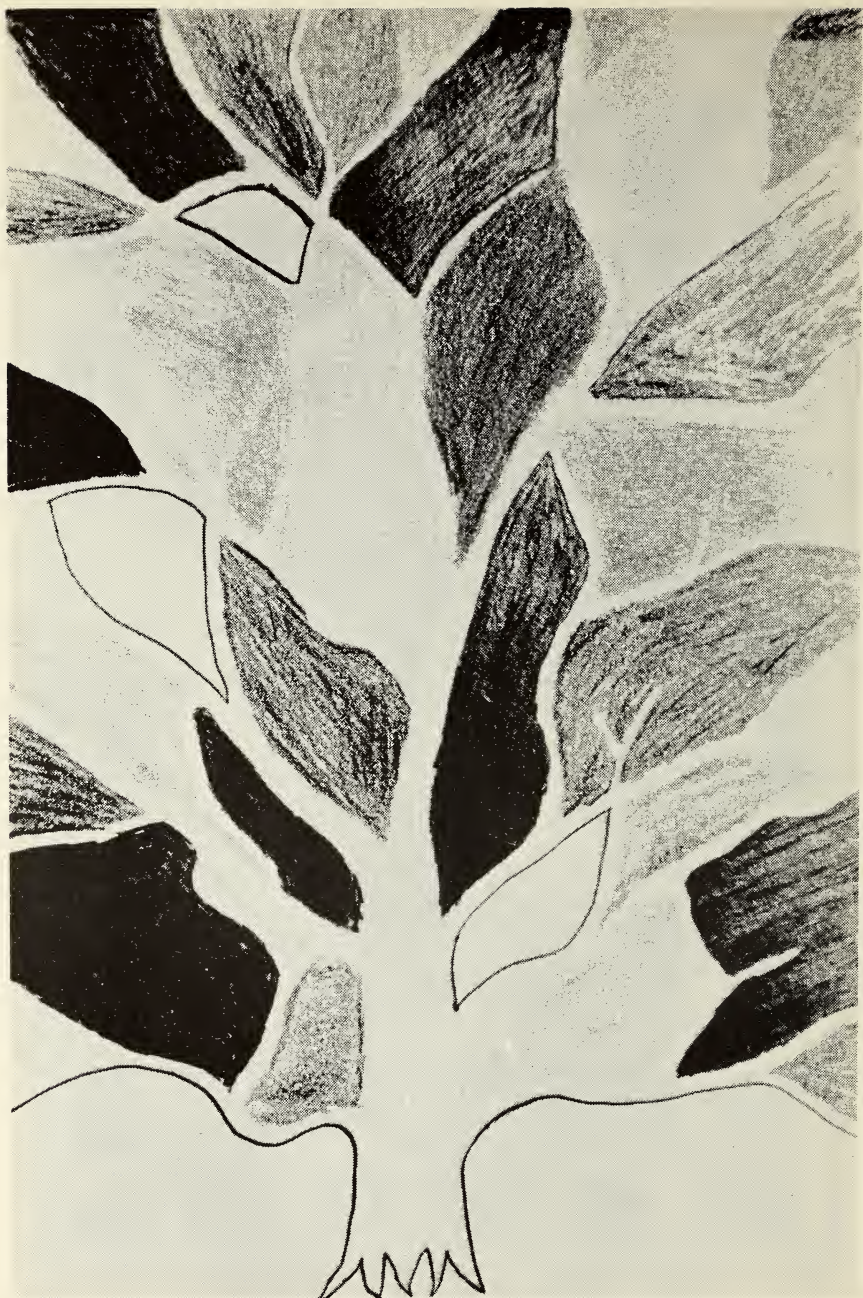


—Tobie Thompson









# *What Am I*

A magnet . . . a large, ugly shaped magnet consisting of four sides: three sides rough, unrefined, with one side smooth and shiny. I am dark, cold, and heavy.

All around me are other magnets, but smaller, much smaller than myself. These cold, black bits are attracted to me because I am larger, therefore stronger than they.

I am covered on all three coarse sides by these tiny parasites, but now spaces are filled so they are collecting like leeches on my one beautiful bright side. I beg them to stop! I fight to keep them off! They only laugh while swiftly racing to cover me completely. I wrestle and plead; but still they continue devouring me, more aggressively now that they have discovered my only gift to life, my brilliance. They seek to blot out my shine forever.

Once for a brief moment I feel a surge of hope for freedom rising within, but to no avail. Out numbered and with despair I surrender. Darkness is approaching; my beautiful light is lost in the onslaught of these cold pigmies who have no mercy.

Completely covered, I cannot see or be seen. My thoughts are the only thing left, for no longer can I speak aloud.

In the mirror of my mind, I see a reflection of what I probably look like--one huge mass of quivering matter void of any emotion that should belong to the animal called "man." No more am I an individual among other individuals, but it's as if I had never existed.

If one were to look at me now, or what is supposed to be me, one would conceive that I am constructed entirely of thousands of minute particles of magnet from core to outer surface, forming a sphere rather similar in appearance to the round, prickly fruit of the sweet gum tree. However, this fruit permits a freedom I am deprived of. It has holes among its spiny fingers allowing the inner core to peek out at least to observe life.

I am not permitted to observe, only to speculate. A lifetime of conditioning in what is right and proper has alienated me from life as I once saw others live it. How am I to discern what is right and what is wrong if I am prevented the freedom to explore?

Those who gaze with admiration upon my newly-formed spherical beauty have not the depth to comprehend that, as a person, I have been obliterated. I was but am no longer. Little do these admirers know the emptiness of being robbed of the opportunity to



express those Creator-given gifts which are fulfilling to dedicated individuals.

The annihilation of my spirit is loneliness, the darkness of my soul. It hovers like death, smothering my life. Lost am I within myself.

Occasionally, beneath my blanket of smug parasites, whose weight is now almost paralytic, I begin to stir, to reactivate those molecules of some energy past, only to be repressed and reminded again that I am here not for self-expression but here as a slave to its master's bidding.

If I were a color I would be gray totally dependent upon black.

—J. Elain Neal





# *Blank Paper Blues*

Blank pages of paper  
Make me uncomfortable.  
They look so lonely, so sad, so empty  
With nothing but parallel lines  
To give them any appearance of life,  
A life, straight and blue.  
So I take my pen  
And write on the pages  
The words that are in me  
And the many new ones we discover together.  
We both are growing  
We are become one, together we are free.

It's funny how much I am  
Like blank pages of paper.  
There is a loneliness, a sadness, an emptiness  
Lying in the parallel lines  
Of my own share of life,  
A share, straight and blue.  
So I have some lines  
Empty on my pages;  
They are parallel lines;  
They've gone on forever untouched.  
I've got a lot of lines to share;  
I wish someone would write on me.

—Linda Wooten



## *The Birthday Present*

Actually, I think I never would have known if it were not for the party. That, I think, was what did it. Oh, I had put up with it before, knowing something was not quite right with my father and me, but I had just found ways of ignoring it, had just let it ride. It wasn't that we didn't get along, actually. In fact, from any outsider's point of view, even in the family we could have been taken for the best of friends. It was ironic, in a way, that our actions professed such sincerity when in reality each of us was wearing a mask. And both knew it. It is difficult to explain our relationship then. To all eyes we were as normal as father and daughter could be; yet strangely enough, both of us, when alone, by some mutual compact, dropped all pretenses and resumed our respected identities. There was no open show of hostility. More often, it was just a silence, noiseless in its way, and yet pounding in its fullness. It was like we were existing separately in two different worlds. Yes, there had been times of closeness, but they were long ago when I was much younger. Now it seemed as I grew older, those times were less frequent, too hard to recapture. But no matter, I had found other things to be concerned with.

They had not taken the place of what I could have had with my father, but friends did help, and there was school and other more important activities. And until the night of the party, I accepted this as the way it would always be. My indifference, I felt sure, was known only to my father, who never spoke of it. Somehow though, he did not take it in the same way. Sometimes I sensed that underneath all the play-acting he was really trying. I suppose he loved me in his own, strange way, but he was not one to show it with any outward expression. I remember even as I was a little girl, when mother used to make him mad. He would not say much - just close his mouth in a hard, straight line. After a while he would get up and go outside and walk. He never told anybody where he wandered, so lost would he be in his turmoil of thoughts. But he was always back soon smiling, even if he did look a little tired or strained to me. Yes, he seemed to me, always trying to compensate for something I never did fully understand, never could see.

I was not one to feel neglected, though, especially now — when I was planning to celebrate my seventeenth birthday. Everyone was cooperating with me for one of the biggest of its kind. My guest list was long, and I was delighted that most were able to accept. The morning of my birthday, I awoke and attempted to quell my childish

buoyancy. My father was the last to the table. I hardly noticed until I found his gift to me under my plate. It was the usual gift, each dollar representing a year. I was not overly surprised, for all of us had grown to expect this when celebrating a birthday, but I appreciated the gesture and tried to tell him. He waved it aside as if embarrassed, for something else was on his mind. As he started out the door to go to work, he paused and seemed about to speak. Instead, he sighed and slammed the door behind him. I wondered about it at the time, but of course, could not be worried long with things irrelevant to my own plans. At school that day, my studies suffered, but I, heedless of the future, was oblivious to anything other than that having to do with the coming evening.

That night, I met each of my guests at the door, greeting them as warmly as they greeted me. As the evening wore on, I was still feeling high, heady with the exuberance of my being. For I was in my element - a world of thriving activity with noisy people, laughing crowds. I was at the peak of satisfaction, never having felt so complete, laughing loudly at some passing remark, when a shadow crossed the doorway. I didn't wonder at seeing my father. Like the rest of the family, he, too, was to take part in the festivities. What stunned me was the look on his face. It rested there only for a brief instant. For a moment, it was as if a part of his soul had been disclosed. Then, true to form, only I knew his other visage was put on again. He gave a cordial welcome to my visitors, moving determinedly through the throng, and only I detected the still hurt look in his eyes as my friends greeted him politely, but without enthusiasm. We exchanged glances as he left the room with his giving me that superficial, little smile of his. My heart was suddenly constricted. I knew, as I had known, realizing for the first time when I had glimpsed his face in that first moment why so much was lost between us. But the party! I must get through the night! I swallowed hard. My mouth was frozen in a pasted smile. It was my turn to pretend now. I jested with them all, until the end, with brassy laughter ringing in my ears. At last the door closed behind the last one.

I turned, quickly to go find my father and explain. I knew now, and I would say . . I would say that . . . what could I say? Words would never say it right. Though I might try to define it, they would seem as empty phrases to him, falling into the same nameless void. I picked up a bright piece of crepe paper and smoothed it absently with my fingers. Would he ever know? It had never been him. The fault had always been mine. He was hurting not because he could not get into

my world, but because he had been locked out. His love had been real all the while. It was me. I had loved, yes, but in the wrong way. I gave my love freely only if I thought I could benefit from it. Mine was a selfish love, all taking with no giving. I crushed the tiny ornament in my palm. It served as a mocking reminder of the excitement of the night. The cluttered room was suddenly stifling. I went out to the porch. The night air was refreshing, and as the wind picked up, I felt with some surprise the tears beginning to dry on my cheek. Angrily I brushed them away and started walking swiftly through the yard. The street held a vacant stare and shadows played quietly beside me. I had not gone far before a truth slowly began to shapen itself in my mind. Love could not be said. Neither could you prove it with words. It was more, even, than actions. It could not be bought; the words and the gifts were an outgrowth of the feeling. I took a street that led back to the house. That was it. It's the feeling that's important. Nothing else was necessary. I turned around the last corner. In the dim streetlight I saw another solitary figure walking before me. I hesitated, then a lightness rose in me that moved my feet. I ran to catch up with my father, knowing before I reached him that we would share another silence. But this time would be different. As usual, the masks would be dropped, but this time we would also share a oneness. The wall separating our worlds was, even now, tumbling at our feet. Both of us could feel, because now **both** understood . . . and not just one, but **both** were reaching out.

—Ann McVay

Brookhaven High School





## Ze

When I was a young child, all blue eyes and pigtails, I would lie in my grandmother's big feather bed at night and shiver in fear as she told me tales of the Sack Man. The Sack Man was a horrid looking ghoulish creature that carried bad girls and boys away in his big sack. I was constantly afraid at night that he was going to carry me off because of my bad deeds that day. As I grew older, though, my fear waned and changed into curiosity as to whether there really was a Sack Man or not. One day when Granny and I were sitting on our long front porch, she in her rocker and I at her feet, she told me that it was time I knew about the Sack Man.

"My family and I lived in a split log house about a quarter of a mile away from the community dump, which was an old, dry creek bed a few hundred feet away from the narrow rutted road that passed our house. Everyone was poor then, but there was one person worse off than any of us. His name was Ezekiel Boone.

"Ze Boone lived in a ramshackle old shanty over in the woods near the dump. He had no friends so to speak and no relatives that anyone knew about. Ze made his living by going through the dump on weekdays and by going from house to house on Saturdays, asking for any broken plow points or bits of metal we might have. These he sold in town, along with the dump combings. He never got very much for them, just enough to buy staple goods for the next week.

"Ze was not really an old man. He was perhaps forty or forty-five, but he resembled some prehistoric fossil come to life. His skin was a dark mahogany color that was textured like the skin of a half-rotten pear. His face was pitted badly from smallpox and black, rough-textured moles were scattered in abundance over his face. A nose, not unlike an eagle's beak, hooked out from between two deep-set, watery, gray eyes. Heavy, black brows grew on the protruding ridges of his forehead. Ze's body, once tall and muscular, was now stooped and warped. He always looked as if he carried some invisible burden on his back.

"Ever since I can remember, Ze had been there. Every morning he passed our house, his holey, felt hat pulled low, shuffling along with his sack. My sister, Olivia, and I would watch him every morning and tell each other scary tales about him.

"Livy was a year older than me, but we started to school the same year. I remember how we used to pass Ze on our way to school. We were scared to death, that is -- we were until we got down the road

a'ways. When we felt we were a safe distance from him we would, in our cruel childish way, taunt him and sing our mean verses. Then we would turn and run, laughing, to school, our molasses bucket lunch pails banging. We never saw the solitary tear run down Ze's face or the hurt in his eyes.

"The summer I was twelve a traveling revival came to our community. A big canvas tent was erected in a meadow down the road. The minister was a tall, thin, severe man with a pinched nose. He wore a black suit and hat and went to everyone's house to invite them to the revival. He even went to Ze's shanty over by the dump.

"On the first night of revival my mother dressed my sister and me in stiffly starched calico dresses abounding with ruffles. We also had to wear thick, black stockings and high button shoes which I detested. Mama braided our hair back so tight, I knew my eyes would slant forever. Our faces were scrubbed 'til they shone like fall apples, and Mama, smiling on her creations, said, "Now you two look beautiful. Remember to sit still during service and act like ladies."

"Then my mama, sister and I got in our buggy and went to the tent. It seemed like everyone in the country was there. Though the tent was filling fast we managed to get a good seat.

"I craned my neck to see who was there that I knew and in the back of the tent I saw Ze Boone. He had discarded his regular tattered attire for a shiny serge suit, badly out of style, that hung on his frame like a curtain in a window.

"Before I could stare anymore I felt Mama pinch my leg and in obedience I turned and faced the minister.

"Mr. Mouse, as I thought he looked, led us in some hymns, took up collection, (of course), and started his sermon. At first I just daydreamed, letting his words bounce inside my head. I was listening, but then again I wasn't. Suddenly something he said brought me from my trance. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Then, without knowing why, I was intent on every word. It was as if a radio show was on that never would be on again and I didn't want to miss anything.

"Mr. Mouse's voice reverberated through the tent. He was saying what a sin it was to ridicule people. He said that although someone may not be as materially well off as you, they were as good or better than you, for they had love. I felt like Mr. Mouse was talking directly to me and I squirmed uneasily. He continued that God knew when you took advantage of people or made fun and that he would send you to hell for it. Then I really was scared. I started remembering all the mean things I had done to Ze Boone and it

bothered me. I started thinking and I knew that God was telling me to change, to be friends, to apologize. I thought about how cruel I had been and started to cry. Right then I made a vow to right things between Ze and myself. I knew then that there was a God.

"The next morning I woke early and with my heart singing, I went outside. Down behind our outhouse daffodils grew. They were soft and yellow, like melted butter. I picked a handful of these and sat out beside the road waiting for Ze to pass. I sat and sat but he never came. Finally, schooltime came and with despair in my heart, I ran to school.

"All through the day I worried and when I got home, big, fat Mrs. Hanvey was sitting on the porch with my mother, her enormous weight making the rocking chair squeak with pain. Just as I entered the yard I heard Mrs. Hanvey say, 'Yes, Priscilla, that's right. They found old Ze Boone dead this morning -- right beside his bed, kneeling, like he was praying. Why! He still had on his church clothes. Stiff as a board, he was!'

"I was crushed. It seemed like the inside of me had caved in. My throat was a knot and not knowing what else to do, I ran behind the outhouse. Throwing myself on the daffodils, I stained their velvet petals with my tears. But no matter how hard I cried, the sorrow wouldn't wash out.

"It was after dark when I finally went inside. Strangely enough, my mother understood and she asked me no questions except if I wanted to go to the funeral. I told her yes, and she held me close and comforted me as only a mother can.

"The funeral was the next day at an old delapidated graveyard, dating back to before the war. No one was there except the preacher, the gravediggers, two old derelicts, Ze's old maid sister from Justine, and me. The derelicts blubbered and cried. They were old friends from Ze's youth. The sister just stood there, her black veil covering any expressions of sorrow. The service was short and when the preacher finished, the derelicts stumbled off through the tombstones, crying. The preacher left, then the gravediggers. Only the sister and I were there. She had never moved, and I started wondering if she was real. In my hand was a bunch of daffodils. I laid them on the grave and knelt there and apologized to Ze and asked forgiveness. Then, as if moved to answer for her brother, the sister put her wrinkled hand on my shoulder and in a quavery voice said, 'Thank you, honey. I'm sure he heard.'

"I couldn't stand it any longer. I turned and left, leaving the



sister standing by the grave, her black veil hiding any expression of sorrow."

My grandmother stopped rocking and dropped her head. I couldn't say anything. I just sat. This was something that changed her life, and whether I knew it then or not, it changed mine.

My Granny died soon after she told me about the "Sack Man" . . And on her grave I put a handful of daffodils.

—Connie Shiel

